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# INDIAN HORIZONS

- 5    What if the Heart Stops Beating (fiction)  
     *Keki N. Daruwalla*
- 12   Mass Communication in India  
     *G.P. Jain*
- 17   Edwin Arnold and *The Light of Asia*  
     *V.S. Naravane*
- 34   Caste and Modernization in India Today  
     *Nirmal Sengupta*
- 44   Four Reviews  
     *K.S. Ramakrishna Rao*
- 51   Brief Notices  
     *D. Raghavan*

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# What if the Heart Stops Beating

*Keki N. Daruwalla*

When he boarded the train at Ferozepur the Professor discovered that he was the only passenger in the first class. He put up the glass shutters to prevent the soot and the cold from getting in. He had retired only two years ago, though he did not look that aged at first glance, a short dapper figure reading a book, the spectacles perched over his nose which went curving down like the beak of a falcon. But a closer look showed dark sacs under the eyes and two wrinkles cutting across the cheeks as if in a pincer movement towards the corners of the mouth. A gold collar-stud, a pair of gold links and a tie with the grey, green and crimson stripes of the Punjab Wanderers, a cricket club which had petered out in the early forties, denoted his sartorial conservatism. He closed his book for a few minutes finding the grey light outside as well as the anaemic light within the compartment, inadequate. Dusk vanished in an instant, a band of powdered orange ground to charcoal. The electric bulbs flared brighter as if the night outside had pulsed some blood into them. Except for the lighted squares which the train threw on either side of the track, he could see nothing outside, and was compelled to reopen his book.

At the next station, a man entered the compartment. The Professor was careful enough to ask him to show his ticket. The passenger, attired in western clothes did so without taking any umbrage. The stretch from Ferozepur to Moga was notorious and the Professor was just a trifle cautious.

After a five minute halt at Moga the train steamed off. The Professor found the other passenger moving towards the door which he had locked. Even as he peered suspiciously over the other's shoulder, the door swung open and two burly peasants clambered

up the train and threw a turban at the Professor's face and slapped the heel of the palm to his lips to smother any cry. They gave him a few hard blows on his face and stuffed his mouth with rags. They took off his necktie (almost strangling him in the effort) and bound his hands. They took his links, his collar-stud, his Parker fountain pen and wristwatch, and the little cash on him. They tore open his attache case even as he became agitated, trying desperately to say something, bound as he was, shaking the while like a person stricken with tetanus. He was trying to tell them that they could have the key. Why must they rip the suitcase open? This infuriated the robbers further. They hit him again, tied his hands behind him this time and threw him in the toilet. At the next station they quietly got off.

Another station later the Professor was discovered and fished out of the toilet and made to write a report. A crowd of commiserating Railway officials and passengers hemmed him in. A businessman hazarded the guess that the robbers must have come for him as he was carrying some cash, but he had deliberately chosen to travel by IIIrd class.

When he got down at Ludhiana he went first to the Waiting Room, removed his blood-spattered shirt and wore a new one. Even though the cold water stung his bruised face, he washed it. He saw his face in the mirror, puffy and worn, the bruises just dark patches on his monochrome face. Dipping his handkerchief in the running water he wiped away some of the blood stains on his coat. It wouldn't do to shock the family the moment they opened the door.

He was left with no cash and unthinkingly sat in a rickshaw, not realizing that cab or rickshaw, he would have to ask his wife to pay the fare. He felt something unreal about the evening, being unreconciled to the mugging as yet. He still seemed floating in limbo. The mind had certainly registered what had happened, like a scribe noting a massacre on the log book of history. But what about the inner "him", the outraged self, that cacaphonous medley of voices which threatened to submerge his reasoning faculties in a crashing crescendo of protest. Just like that! You sit in a train one fine morning, sorry evening, and a couple, sorry, three-some, of bastards come along and rob you almost face-down in the toilet! And not as much as a thank you or a word of apology at the end! He should not have worn those gold links. Stupid thing to do. And he should not have travelled First. Not in this goddammed, robber-infested stretch, this sidewalk of hell, this track where only souls in bale should commute! And they didn't *have* to beat him up! They could have just gagged him! They needn't have ripped

his attache case open. He was willing to part with the dashed key, as it is! And this could be happening all over. One had no idea how many people must be being brutalized and traumatized by some hulking swine!

The smog in the town stung his eyes. That at least was real. Despite the whirlwind of thoughts raging in his mind the evening stretched out before him shivering with fragile and highly wrought detail. He noticed even the silences. The hawkers were no longer crying out aloud. They were gathering their things and calling it a day. He noticed the barrows, laden with roasted groundnut and sweets peppered with linseed, and dimly lit with hurricane lanterns, being trundled homewards silently by the roadside vendors. He saw shutters clanging down and small fish-and-barbecue kiosks being closed. He noticed tar drums bisecting a road one half negotiable, the other half a clammy mess of gravel overlaid with a glutinous coat of tar. In the darker stretches the rickshaw puller drove the pedi cab furiously, ringing the bell continuously to startle unwary pedestrians and scything his zig-zag way through the traffic.

His daughter Archana heard his footsteps, flung open the window and shouted "Dad, Kapil got eighty five". It could not be his marks. Must be his cricket score. The thought made its way across his slightly befuddled mind like a slow-motion TV-rerun of a forward slipping past a defender near the striking zone. His wife Sarla, noticed his grey expression, and the face turning slightly green at the gills. She noticed that he did not have his tie on and thought it a little odd that he had asked her to pay off the rickshaw-puller. But she did not want to stand between him and the children. They were not children. Kapil was twenty and Archana two years younger. But what if the children did not notice?

"What happened?" she asked him quietly.

"Let's have dinner first. I'll tell you later".

But he could not have dinner. The rags which had been stuffed into the mouth had caused bruises all over the tongue, palate and gums. Sarla gave him a lukewarm cup of milk which was the only thing he could take. He told them the entire incident and even mentioned inadvertently that once he thought they would really do him in. "I wish I was there!" said Kapil with the kind of look which the hero reserves for the abductor of his beloved in an Indian movie. He showed them the blood-stained shirt. When he indicated the torn suitcase he exclaimed ruefully "Sikh culture". He felt contrite immediately. It could have been any villager throwing his turban at him. The passenger who had entered the compartment on a valid ticket was certainly not a Sikh. At the moment he



found it difficult to recollect whether the other two even sported beards.

"I thought of all of you there, you know. Your images flashed before my eyes."

"You mean in the toilet?" asked Archana.

"Yes" he answered, rather embarrassed.

"Dad, what a place to think of us!"

A little later Archana asked "How did the lecture go?" He shrugged it off. It did not fit in with his present concerns.

The lecture? O yes the lecture. He had quite forgotten it. "Approach to Aesthetics", wasn't it? Delivered to the "Literary Study Circle" of the Government College, Ferozepur. Why did they have to call themselves 'literary'. And did all this blah blah have any relevance to all that was happening around them? Could aesthetics relate to what took place in the train? Who the hell was bothered about inwardness and subjectivity, the "subversion of experience" and whether art went to bed or no with "established reality". The last was a phrase he had used at the lecture. Since then his notions on reality, established or no, had undergone a change. Three hoodlums had seen to that, he reflected. No, two hoods and one slimy operator. He hated him the most, the chap in the western clothes who had opened the door, the man who had betrayed his class and his culture. The others were from a different world. There was no point faulting them. If a fellow incites two animals to attack you, one can't blame the animals.

He changed into his dressing gown and sat on an armchair in the corridor, resting his feet against the wall opposite.

"You know Dad you have promised Kapil a blazer when he gets his first hundred? You better be ready with the money. He is going to get it any day now."

Hearing this Kapil also came out. "You know what I did today? I stopped putting my right hand into the strokes. Especially the drive. And Dad, the feel of it! You can't imagine! Formerly you put the weight of your whole body into the stroke and yet the ball just burrowed into the ground. Not today. I picked my half volleys well, not just swatting at the ball the moment it had landed, you understand. That only raises dust. I waited for just a fraction of micro second after it pitched.

"You could hole out that way."

"Well eventually I did. But it was better this way. The ball just sped to the boundary each time you came out and slammed it. I was spared the digging and the dust."

"Jyoti's brother also got a fifty," Archana chipped in. "You

know Jyoti's sister has given me some *prasad* she brought from *Vaishno Devi*. Would you like to have some?"

"Not now."

"They went all the way by cab. Had to fork out a thousand bucks for the taxi alone."

"Must be stinking rich" he said, desperately trying to keep his interest in the conversation alive.

"Rich yes, but they don't stink. They never show off or anything of the sort. And just when they were there it snowed, can you imagine? Her father says it is very lucky."

"He meant 'auspicious'."

"He *said* 'auspicious', come to think of it."

"How horrid it sounds, and how victorian." Her mouth flowered with distaste as if a patch of fungus had appeared there.

"Yes, almost as bad as 'auspices', especially if you are talking about the auspices of a Literary Study Circle."

"How *did* the talk go Dad. You haven't told us." She feigned petulance.

"It is irrelevant child! I almost copped it! And you talk of *prasad* and poetry and aesthetics! You don't seem to realize I could have died!"

"But you didn't Dad, and that is what matters. Just try and forget this as you forget a bad dream. It is over and done with. Look ahead now. Don't look back."

How do I explain to this child that at sixty you don't look ahead because there is precious little to look forward to. Ahead of you is only old age and gout and death. One looks back not due to any nostalgia but because one has to look at something and it is more pleasant to view the sunnier half of life.

Going into the bedroom he found his wife looking quizzically at his bloody shirt as if it had just arrived by mail.

"Do you want a massage, a rub-down with iodox or something?" she asked.

"No, we'll see tomorrow". It isn't the body which is hurt, he wanted to tell her. The hurt goes inside, that is the funny part of it. The flesh gets a battering and the hurt goes down to that sensitive, febrile abstraction we call the soul, as vulnerable as a colony of humming birds.

"You better get after Kapi!" she said. "It is cricket, cricket, cricket the whole day! This is no way to prepare for your M. Sc. It is not the time he spends playing that I mind. But he dreams about it! He just can't concentrate! He hasn't touched his books for the last three days. Archana, of course, I have given up long

ago. She wastes her time in gossip or reading those syrupy romances and pretends to be busy with her college magazine. She has managed to acquire all the qualities I despise. She is pseudo, pretentious, superficial!"

"These are all facets of a personality at one particular stage of development. Within a year she will outgrow all this."

"I hope!" she snorted, turning over on her side.

Each one lost in the warp and woof of his own cocoon, he thought. Here he was, having almost received extreme unction at the hands of three scoundrels. Yet this had failed to jolt them out of their routine. Each mired in his own bog, or bogged in his own mire, whichever way you wanted it. That was the great thing about English, you could think it, speak it, write it any way you pleased. For a fleeting instant he thought of Uborbous, the mythical serpent with mouths at both ends.

Or was he making just a little too much of all this? How would an American have reacted, especially the tough long-boned ones you get to see in the movies. If the wife had become alarmed at seeing the bloodstains he would perhaps have said laconically, in a voice that managed to convey both gruffness and affection at the same time, "Just a scrape with some shysters, Honey. Now sleep off, will yer?"

He did not stir in his bed. It would only betray his uneasiness to Sarla, and make her restive in turn. That would be more ludicrous than tragic, each tossing on one's own bed of pain, ineffectually grappling with his own core of anxiety. He kept his eyes open. This way he was just confronted by the visual asceticism of the wall. Closing the eyes brought on too many visual distractions where you could fantasize about anything, from undersea debris to the corner-stones of the sky, those 360 rivets that held the roof in its place and kept it from blowing off.

He let the night really fall all around him, like dew; let the noises fade away, the scrape of a pedestrian's feet, the distant hoot of a steam engine, a passing car. And as the city died around him, night awoke, cricket-chirp, owl-hoot and the coughing fit of an alcoholic returning to his irate wife. These noises were the black essence of night, they came from the core of her dark heart, he thought. But as the city slept off the hum and the whine of power spindles came to the fore and he felt at one with this insular city listening to its own irregular heart-beat. A muted serrating sound came to his ears. It would have been someone sawing away at the window bars, or just a rat-nibble. He vowed he would not let this incident unnerve him. He was not going to be frightened of noises—foot-

steps, a body thud or the clank of a falling shadow. Already, he convinced himself, incident was remote, cut adrift from sense. But the mind, the plotting, web-weaving mind exuded its chills. He knew that memory itself, from something richly evocative, had turned into a trauma. He could not shake it off. The robbery was ensconced like a house on a promontory jutting out over the river of his subconscious.

There must be other houses, he reflected, with others lying supine, their brains awash with similar tides of thoughts. Each house a sort of a terminal ward containing all sorts of repositories of unhappiness. Humanity was a faceless crowd in need of just two kinds of people, a historian to chronicle its pain and baffled rages and a physician to prescribe balm and unguents. And of course a priest for the last rites. Three people could ferry humanity safely across to the other bank and give it a decent burial. An easy way to die was, after all, what living was all about, wasn't it?

He felt a pain in his heart, a stiletto-stab which started from that wall of muscle adjoining his chest-bone. And what a chest-bone. It was as if the Almighty had scraped the bone and scooped out a hollow for what good reason one could not fathom. He knew the pain for what it was, an upthrust of wind pressing against the heart. He was not going to be frightened. A nice rumbling belch and the pain would lessen. But his doctor friends had told him, some day you will go through a heart attack and still think it is gas. What if the heart stops beating, he wondered. They would all attribute it to the robbery. The shock, they would say, the humiliation! That is what did it.

He felt like a man watching himself die in a mirror. And his past faces came back to him, like serpent scales, each separately pocked and printed with its own intricate, exquisite, sometimes frightening filigree.

# Mass Communication in India

G. P. Jain

Mass communication in India can be the easiest occupation, and yet the most worrisome. Easiest, because you can walk into any rural home carrying your message, you will be fussed over and lionized because you are coming from a city where all the wise and rich men live. Worrisome, because your words fail to impress those intended to be impressed, let alone carry conviction with them, and you come back nursing self-guilt at the years-long neglect of the villages where the soul of India is said to live. Dolefully, you reflect on the several questions your visit raised which remain unanswered in your own mind and you feel no fruitful communication is possible any more.

In India at the present time a titanic struggle is on between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. High falutin' official proclamations of intent to improve the economic and social condition of the 'have nots', without caring to investigate what impact an earlier legislation or administrative decree made on the target audience, tend to be counter productive. They raise unnecessary expectations and breed dissatisfaction.

Bank loans and Government subsidies are earmarked for the rural needy. So also the 'antyodaya' programme which seeks to pull up the very lowest in the economic scale in the countryside. But the official infra-structure is geared to communicating only the benefits the new plans would bring to the intended beneficiaries and not to inviting their comments or suggestions. For the best result, the masses' right to be heard has to be coalesced with the Government's right to speak to them.

The right to be heard is as necessary, especially in a country where the 'have nots' abound, as the right to communicate. Without

it, communication becomes a barren one-way traffic. In the context of the Indian syndrome, only staunch observance of the right to be heard can ensure effective democracy and a sound economy. At present, the right to be heard is available only to those who are ready to wrest it and hold it.

There is Haraula village in Ghaziabad district in Uttar Pradesh where the common lands were usurped by the local rich enjoying political influence. A wide communication gap existed between the rightful claimants and Government. Some young men of that village stepped in and through community action built up enough pressure on the Government so that it was compelled to reverse the illegal land transfers in favour of the rightful claimants. 'Antyodaya' families are given either a milch cow or a sewing machine. They gratefully receive what is given them but were they given the right to be heard they might perhaps have asked for something different and more gainful.

Even in the area of human rights, the right to communicate is no more important than the right of the people to be heard. In respect of either removal of the barbarous bonded labour or horrendous untouchability or strict enforcement of the plans for land consolidation and family planning, the right to speak to the masses has to be correlated with their right to be heard. Communication, therefore, is not the right of the first party to speak, but also postulates the right of the second party to be heard. Only when the two rights mix, the right to communicate is safe.

How does one get the right to be heard? Either it is a gift from a socially aware Government or the affected people may themselves draw on their hidden strength through community action and refuse to accept somebody else's right to speak to them until their own right to be heard is accepted. It is a sad fact that India is not one country, but two countries. One is, by comparison, developed, and the other undeveloped or under-developed. One is urban India and the other rural India. True, there are slums in America and Japan, too. But, by and large, the distinction holds.

Let alone a high level of literacy or economic viability, a quarter of our five-and-a-half-lakh villages do not even have clean drinking water. Schools that exist are of a very low standard. Except for a few radios, the villages are sealed tight against external, intrusion, unless their squabbles spill over, making it necessary for them to go to a police station or court.

How do you communicate to such people? Here is a case in point. The Government decreed that the landless be given land out of the village common lands. Orders went down to the lowest level

and documents authenticating leases were given away amidst much fanfare, but the land which was in the illegal occupation of the local high and mighty and their muscle men was not made over to the new occupiers which gave rise to the strange anomaly that while the rightful claimants paid Government revenue, the illegal occupiers continued to enjoy the usufruct of the lands they held unlawfully. In such a situation, even the best motivated and best intentioned communication plan goes haywire and word passes around fast in the community that all what the Government plans to do is a facade and has no real substance in it. In such an event, communication planning ends in fiasco.

The print media, especially the rural press, may effectively be pressed into service. The rural press is still a fledgling, but its potentialities are vast. Not a day passes when an injustice is not perpetrated on a section of the village community by the rich few or the underlings of bureaucracy. Like a social worker, a rural paper can win the people's confidence and trust if it fights their causes in a crusading spirit. What the urban press did during the independence struggle for the national cause, the rural press can do now for the rural cause and earn the nation's gratitude.

An ambitious adult literacy plan has been launched in the country. The objective is incontestable, but it still may founder because of faulty implementation. For lasting result, a three or six month crash programme will not be enough. The three components of the adult literacy drive are promotion of literacy, functional skill and social awareness. The rural press can achieve the third objective splendidly.

Also, in the transfer of new farm technology to the masses the rural press can play a vital role. The written word enjoys far more credibility than the spoken word on the electronic media and endures longer. Anything printed in a newspaper carries in most cases the aura of acceptability. To the rural masses especially, the written word is sacrosanct.

If, despite radio and television, the urban press is depended upon to generate demand for consumer articles, the rural press can also be expected to do a similar job in the countryside. With vigorous selling, more village people can be persuaded to buy such articles as will bring them physical comfort or credit for being consumer pioneers. The opportunity is, however, limited now, because 50% of the farm households in India do not own more than one hectare of agricultural land, 33% own less than even half a hectare. Those owning more than four hectares are only 15% of the population. But with the growth of agriculture and industry, the sale of consumer

articles is bound to grow in the rural areas. The rural press can undoubtedly accelerate the process.

The vexing question, however, is how to get the rural people to read the rural press. There are no agents or hawkers in the villages. In many places there is no railhead. Selling rural subscriptions is not remunerative to the canvasser. A solution may be that Government should buy subscriptions to good rural papers and ask their offices to supply them direct to the village panchayat leaders, school teachers and other rural opinion-makers. If a prestigious and internationally known magazine, *Reader's Digest*, still launches a drive for complimentary subscriptions, surely the Indian rural press should be able to benefit by such a drive, too. A major reason for the failure of most Government plans is the absence of a strong rural press to educate, inform and advise the educated rural opinion-makers week after week or month after month.

However, until the media such as the rural press, radio and traditional media, such as puppetry and 'kathas', begin to play effective roles, the sole reliable medium is inter-personal communication which is, at present, sorely lacking. The use of high-yielding varieties of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides has been readily accepted by the rural elite; in fact, even before a new plant breed is issued by a research station, progressive farmers eagerly beg, borrow or steal a few grams of the exotic new seed. But the problem is how to get the less progressive and small farmers to adopt new varieties to augment production and consequent rural prosperity. Inter-personal communication on a massive scale carried through earnestly can bring about a large quantitative change in the rural scene.

Each farming community and each industrial unit should have a strong peoples' committee of local workers who explain each government programme to their membership regularly and also deliver the feedback to the central planners and administrators. A fine illustration of this is the quick and effective implementation of land reforms in Kerala. An effective communication machinery can be built on the foundation of local people's committees and the structure will hold superbly.

In Kerala, nobody complains of a communication gap between the administrators at the top and people at the base. Peoples' committees take on the responsibility of two-way communication. As a result, planning at the top is more purposeful and implementation faster and more to the point. Any concession granted to the farmers by the Government is appropriated by the beneficiaries as soon as it is announced.

The 'lab to land' programme of the Indian Council of



Agricultural Research for transfer of technology to small farmers and landless labour has got under way in many areas, but it has as little chance of success as several other programmes of the Central and State Governments until the communication gap between the planners and administrators on one side of the scale and the target audience on the other is filled by vigorous inter-personal efforts, a strong rural press and people's committees at the lowest level.

The task of mass communication with a largely illiterate people in a big country like India is formidable indeed, but so are its rewards when the task is accomplished. Adequately fed on an enriched diet of communication, the giant long held in chains by sloth, slumber and inaction will break them and sweep away before him all that has held him back for centuries from his journey to the destined goal. A right mix of two-way communication with the masses will liberate the hibernating giant force of pristine national consciousness in one stroke and let it march on to the everlasting glory of India.

# Edwin Arnold and The Light of Asia

V. S. Naravane

The true verdict on a book, Emerson once said, is not passed by its immediate readers but “by a court, as of angels,...which is not to be bribed, not be entreated, not to be overawed”. In some rare cases, however, the ‘court of angels’ appointed by posterity upholds, word by word, the judgment pronounced by the immediate readers. Sir Edwin Arnold’s *The Light of Asia*—a poetical biography of the Buddha—belongs to this rare class of books. It was published in England a hundred years ago and immediately became a bestseller throughout the English-speaking world including India. Within a few years sixty editions were published in England and eighty in America, the total sale running into millions. It was translated into a dozen languages. This popularity has remained unabated. What Sir Denison Ross said in 1932 can be repeated today: “The poem still remains the best description of the life of the Buddha in the English language”.

India has special reasons for commemorating the centenary of the publication of *The Light of Asia* and paying a tribute to its author. Edwin Arnold belonged to that select and small band of British administrators in India who not only combined literary and scholarly pursuits with their official work but also identified themselves with the feelings, ideals, aspirations and traditions of the Indian people. He was among the first western writers who tried to remove prejudices against India in the western world and presented a fair picture of the positive aspects of Indian culture. Arnold’s translation of the *Bhagavadgītā* was dedicated to India. The dedicatory stanza reflects his sentiments:

So have I heard this wonderful and spirit-thrilling speech,  
 By Krishna and Prince Arjuna held, discoursing each with  
 each;  
 So have I writ its wisdom here, its hidden mystery,  
 For England; O our India! as dear to me as She!

Arnold was not yet thirty when he set before himself the clear aim of making India better understood in the West. In a note he said: "A long residence in India, and close intercourse with her people, have given the author a lively desire to subserve their advancement. No one now listens to the precipitate ignorance which would set aside as 'heathenish' the high civilisations of this great race; but justice is not yet done to their past development and present capacities". And in his Preface to *The Light of Asia*, written nearly two decades later, he again expressed his deep feeling for India. "This work has been composed", he wrote, "in the brief intervals of days without leisure, but is inspired by an abiding desire to aid in the better mutual knowledge of East and West. The time may come, I hope, when this book...will preserve the memory of one who loved India and the Indian peoples".

Edwin Arnold was born in 1832. He had a brilliant academic career at Oxford. In 1852 he won the Newdigate Prize at the University College, Oxford, for his poem *The Feast of Belshazzar*. The poem not only revealed his creative talents but also showed his interest in oriental themes. Four years later, he joined the Indian Educational Service and was appointed Principal of the Deccan College at Poona. Later, he became a Fellow of the Bombay University. With a remarkable flair for languages, he was able to acquire proficiency in Sanskrit and Pali. As a student he had already gained adequate command over Latin and Greek. Arnold was thus well equipped for his study of oriental literature.

Arnold produced three major works of translation from Sanskrit into English: *The Light of Asia*, which will be discussed in detail in this essay; *The Song Celestial*, a poetical rendering of the *Bhagavadgītā*; and *The Indian Song of Songs*, a slightly abridged translation of Jayadeva's *Gītāgovinda*. These works indicate maturity of reflection and interpretation as well as sound scholarship. Arnold made judicious use of the writings of his predecessors and contemporaries in the field, especially William Jones, Lassen, St. Hilaire, Burnouf and Sehlegel. In his prefatory remarks he acknowledged, in a spirit of genuine humility, his debt to these scholars and to the Indian pundits from whom he learnt Sanskrit.

The three translations mentioned above do not exhaust the list

of Edwin Arnold's writings on Indian themes. He also published an essay on *Indian Poetry* (1881), a memoir entitled *India Revisited* (1886), a Buddhist study called *Lotus and Jewel* (1887) and *The Queen's Justice: A True Story of Indian Village Life* (1899). His thoughts on Indian education were expressed in his *Letter from an Ex-Principal to His Appointed Successor*. After his death, his writings on Indian subjects were included in several anthologies. Three of these may be mentioned here: *Oriental Poems* edited by J.N. Watkins (1904), *Indian Poems and Idylls* (1915) and *Arnold Poetry Reader* (Selections, with a Memoir and Notes by E.J. Arnold, 1920).

Much as he loved India, Arnold's oriental interests included the Middle East and the Far East as well. He studied Persian, Arabic and Turkish literatures mainly through English translations, though he did acquire some knowledge of Persian and Turkish. He even published a grammar of the Turkish language, with dialogues and vocabulary (1877). He studied the Islamic tradition with the same sympathetic understanding that he showed in his interpretations of Hinduism and Buddhism. This is amply borne out by two of his writings: *Pearls of Faith, or A Rosary of Islam* (1883) and *With Saadi in the Garden, or A Book of Love* (1888).

Late in life, Arnold spent a few years in Japan. He married a Japanese lady and became deeply interested in Japanese art, culture and ways of life. This interest is reflected in three of his books: *Seas and Lands* (1891) *Japonica* (1892) and *Adzuma, or the Japanese Wife* (a Play in Four Acts, 1896).

Arnold was by no means indifferent to his own cultural heritage. After his retirement from the Indian Educational Service, he did a good deal of journalistic work in England and became a leader-writer of the *Daily Telegraph*. His articles in this prestigious paper showed a sound grasp of contemporary social and political developments. But poetry, religion and mythology continued to be the focal points of his work. In the early phase of his literary career, classical and medieval European literature had claimed his attention. One of his earliest published works was entitled *Griselda: A Tragedy, and Other Poems* (1856). Now, in his later phase, he turned to Christian themes. *Potiphar's Wife and Other Poems* (1892) draws heavily upon the Old Testament. In the preceding year he had published his poetical account of the life of Jesus Christ under the title: *Light of the World*.

Edwin Arnold was knighted by Queen Victoria and was awarded the K.C.I.E. in 1888. He died on March 24, 1904.

In all his translations of Indian classics, Arnold's central aim was to emphasize the positive, enduring elements of the original and

to correct the one-sided or distorted interpretations of western scholars. Referring to Schlegel's praise of the *Bhagavadgītā*, he says in his Preface to *The Song Celestial*: "So lofty are many of its declarations, so sublime its aspirations, so pure and tender its piety, that Schlegel, after his study of the poem, breaks forth into an outburst of delight and praise towards its unknown author". Arnold's rendering shows a deep awareness of the philosophical depth and profundity of the *Gītā*. As for Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda*, which many western writers had condemned for its alleged 'eroticism', Arnold sees in the poem a sublime allegory. Through descriptions of Krishna's love for the *gopis* and for Radha—Arnold says—"the human soul is displayed in its relations alternately with earthly and celestial beauty. Krishna, at once human and divine, is first seen attracted by the pleasures of the senses (personified by the shepherdesses in the wood), and wasting his affections upon the delights of the illusory world. Radha, the spirit of intellectual and moral beauty, comes to free him from this error by enkindling in his heart a desire for her own surpassing loveliness".

In *The Light of Asia*, too, Arnold seeks the deeper meaning behind the Buddha legend. The historical Buddha, born as Siddhārtha, is seen as only one of the manifestations of the eternal Buddha-principle. At the same time, while presenting the legend he emphasizes the intensely human side of the Master's personality. Compassion is the dominant *rasa*; but Siddhārtha is portrayed as a sensitive human being responding with all his heart to varied situations evoking joy, wonder and love as well. A century ago, when Arnold wrote his poem, the mention of Gautama, the Buddha, evoked in western minds the image of a gloomy, austere prophet, brooding over the vanity of all earthly things and bemoaning the pain which was the lot of mankind. *The Light of Asia* presents an entirely different image. Prince Siddhārtha, in his boyhood and youth, is shown as a complete, balanced human being. "There is not a single act or word", to quote Arnold himself, "which mars the perfect unity and tenderness of this Indian teacher, who united the truest princely qualities with the intellect of a sage and the passionate devotion of a martyr". As for the Buddha's teaching, Arnold sees in it "the eternity of a universal hope, the immortality of a boundless love, an indestructible element of faith in final good, and the proudest assertion ever made of human freedom".

Arnold's treatment of the Buddha's life is characterised by several important features. Three of these may be briefly mentioned here. In the first place, he brings out the close relationship between Buddhism and Hinduism, and places the Buddha firmly in the

Indian milieu. Instead of dwelling on the conflict or opposition between the two faiths, as some western scholars had done, Arnold depicts the Buddha as the continuator of an age-old tradition. The Buddha's is to fulfil, not to destroy. He is repelled by some aspects of the prevalent system of values and attitudes. But he also appeals to the perennial wisdom of his land sometimes even quotes the authority of the scriptures.

Secondly, in Edwin Arnold's work there is a constant emphasis on the aesthetic side of the Buddha's personality. *The Light of Asia* contains some fine descriptions of natural beauty, and Prince Siddhārtha is shown as being keenly sensitive to the sights, sounds and scents of his natural environment. Throughout the poem, there is uninterrupted harmony between human perfection and the beauty of nature. Important events in the hero's life evoke joyful responses from Nature: trees blossom forth, fragrant breezes blow, and rivulets make melodious music. The ethical and the aesthetic aspects of life are sometimes supposed to be at variance. In Arnold's poem they enrich and strengthen each other.

Thirdly, in Arnold's interpretation Nirvāna—the central core of the Buddha's teaching—ceases to be an abstract, empty concept. In *The Light of Asia*, the Buddha does not speak of Nirvāna in detail. He is reticent because Nirvāna, the transcendental reality, is indescribable. Our mental and linguistic resources, which are finite and limited cannot convey the nature of the infinite. Any description we give will be one sided and hence unacceptable.

Arnold's poem helped in reviving interest in Buddhism by drawing attention to the human aspect of the Buddha's legendary life; by viewing the Buddha's teaching as an inseparable part of the Indian spiritual heritage; by emphasizing the aesthetic side of Buddhism; and by regarding Nirvāna as a positive state of blessedness rather than a merely negative concept of extinction of the finite. Arnold was not the first to put forward these ideas. Others had done so in a much more scholarly and systematic manner. But Arnold's poetical presentation went straight to the hearts of millions of readers and did more to popularise the life and teachings of the Buddha than the learned expositions of specialists.

Arnold's ideas on Buddhism, summarised above, were accepted by outstanding Indians of the twentieth century who once again stressed the significance of the Buddhist element in India's spiritual and cultural evolution. Among these, the most important were Radhakrishnan, Coomaraswamy and Tagore. Each approached the Buddha and Buddhism in the light of his own distinctive interest and equipment. But they all agreed in their general estimate

of Buddhism and put forward positive interpretations as Arnold had done. All three of them have made appreciative references to *The Light of Asia*.

The influence of Arnold's work was not, however, limited to those who made a special study of Buddhism. Two generations of Indians felt the impact of *The Light of Asia*. All those who wanted to understand the significance of the Buddha's life and teaching felt a deep fascination for Arnold's poem. Jawaharlal Nehru says in his *Autobiography*: "The Buddha story attracted me even in early boyhood, and Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* became one of my favourite books". Later in life, Nehru returned to the poem again and again; and he was deeply moved by some of the passages. Mahatma Gandhi confessed, with his usual candour, that he knew very little about the Buddha and Buddhism until he was introduced to *The Light of Asia* by a friend in England. "I read *The Light of Asia*", he said, "with even greater interest than I did the *Bhagavadgītā*. Once I had begun, I could not leave it off".

Arnold's work has enjoyed as much popularity in England and America as it has in India. Its immediate impact was tremendous. The *Times* of London described it as "the most sympathetic account ever published in Europe of the life and teaching of the Sakya saint, Prince Gautama Siddhārtha, the Lord Buddha". The *Daily Telegraph* hailed Edwin Arnold as "a scholar, a philosopher and a true singer" and described *The Light of Asia* as "a remarkable poem, worthy of a place amongst the great poems of our time". Oliver Wendell Holmes, the famous American poet, wrote in the *International Review*: "*The Light of Asia* is a work of great beauty... Its descriptions are drawn by the hand of a master with the eye of a poet... Its tone is so lofty that there is nothing with which to compare it but the New Testament. It is full of variety, now picturesque, now pathetic, now rising into the noblest realms of thought and aspiration".

While it was acclaimed by the lay reader and by some poets, *The Light of Asia* evoked strong criticism from some scholars and literary critics. It was objected that Arnold has taken too many liberties with the text on which his poem is based; that he attributes to the Buddha remarks which he could not have made; that some of the episodes in the Buddha's life appear in Arnold's poem in the wrong sequence; and that the teachings of Arnold's Buddha lack self-consistency. From the academic point of view many of these objections are valid. In *The Light of Asia* some of the well-known episodes, such as the parable of the mustard seed and the meeting with King Bimbisāra, are introduced *before* the Enlightenment, whereas traditionally they belong to the period after Siddhārtha had

attained Mahābodhi. In Arnold's poem, Siddhārtha bids a silent farewell to his wife, Yashodharā, who is carrying his son in her womb. In the traditionally accepted versions, on the contrary, the Buddha's Great Renunciation takes place *after* the birth of his son Rāhula. In Arnold's version, the Buddha argues in detail against the existence of a benevolent Providence, while the orthodox Buddhist tradition depicts the Master as observing a Noble Silence on metaphysical issues.

It should be conceded that Arnold's work is open to criticism on these questions. However, *The Light of Asia* is avowedly a poetical account of the Buddha's life and message supposed to have been narrated by a devout Buddhist. In his Preface, the author makes this clear at the very outset. "In the following Poem", he says, "I have sought, by the medium of an imaginary Buddhist votary, to depict the life and character and indicate the philosophy of that noble hero...the founder of Buddhism". Later in the Preface he again says: "I have put my poem in a Buddhist's mouth because to appreciate the spirit of Asiatic thoughts they should be regarded from the oriental point of view". In view of the author's clear assertion that his object is to 'indicate' the Buddha's philosophical views and to convey the 'spirit of Asiatic thoughts' it would not be fair to apply standards of logical consistency or historical precision to *The Light of Asia*.

Academic scholars had, as pointed out, genuine grounds for criticising Arnold's poem. Some literary critics, on the contrary, seem to have passed unduly harsh verdicts on *The Light of Asia*, ascribing its success entirely to the newly-awakened interest in oriental religions, and dismissing Arnold's poetic attainments as negligible. These critics contended that Arnold was fortunate in catching public attention when Tennyson had made didactic poetry fashionable; and that he had the additional advantage of writing about the exotic East and using strange-sounding words from Sanskrit and Hindustani. One of the critics described *The Light of Asia* as "emblazoned with a new vocabulary, extravagant in its use of detail and employing strange if cacophonous proper names". "The names in the Buddha legend—Maya, Sujata, Rahula, Cotami, Devadatta—may appear strange to western readers, but few would describe the sounds of these names as harsh, grating or discordant.

As an example of the smugness and superficiality displayed by some of Arnold's critics, it would be interesting to note the comments of B. Ifor Evans: Evans devotes three pages to Edwin Arnold in the chapter on Minor Poets in his book, *English Poetry in the Later Nineteenth Century*. Attributing Arnold's success to the existing



“audience for moral reflection”, Evans says: “His popularity, derived from *The Light of Asia*, showed that new subject-matter couched in verse which the unobservant might mistake for that of Tennyson, would meet the requirements of the multitude”. Asserting that Arnold “fails as a poet”, Evans concedes that “at his best, and with Tennyson to help him, he is not without a certain arresting quality”. *The Light of Asia*, according to this critic, “has much of the charm of *Arabian Nights*...While it titillates the reader with its bizarre movement, it leaves him with the consolation of knowing that he has absorbed a difficult philosophy without inconvenience”.

Can any comparison be less convincing than that between *The Light of Asia* and *Arabian Nights*? Evans shows hardly any appreciation of Arnold’s skillful and sensitive depiction of subtle emotions, profound thoughts, soul-stirring situations. He has no comments to make on Prince Siddhārtha’s noble compassion, on the pathos and grandeur of the Great Renunciation, on Siddhārtha’s epic struggle against Mara, described by Arnold in lines that have moved sensitive readers for a century. His explanation for the success of the poem is that it “meets the requirements of the multitude” for “moral reflection” in verse, and that it consoles the reader by making him feel that he has understood a difficult teaching “without inconvenience”. A literary historian can sometimes be strangely unresponsive to the spiritual dimension of a work which he reviews on the basis of his professional criteria.

Arnold’s poem is based, in its broad outline, on the *Lalitavistara*, a Sanskrit text of the Mahayana school. He has however deviated from the original at several points and has introduced a good deal of new narrative and descriptive material. The first edition of the poem carried the title: *The Light of Asia, or The Great Renunciation*. But Arnold has included in his account of the Buddha’s life many important post-Renunciation events, including the attainment of Mahābodhi and the return to Kapilavastu. In subsequent editions, the subtitle was usually omitted.

In the remainder of this essay I will offer a brief synopsis of *The Light of Asia*, illustrated by lines selected from each part so as to bring out the salient features of the poem.

Book I opens with an account of how the Eternal Buddha, dwelling in the celestial region, felt the signs which convinced him that the time was ripe for him to descend upon earth for the good of all sentient beings, and that Kapilavastu, in the Himalayan foothills, was the right place for his descent. That very night Queen Māyā, wife of King Shuddhodhana, dreamt that a white six-tusked elephant was entering her body. Soothsayers and astrologers interpreted the

dream as presaging the birth of a prince destined to attain universal renown. In due course, the Queen gave birth to a boy who carried thirty-two marks of excellence on his body. Angels and *Yakshas* carried the news to the kingdom of the gods, and "Heaven was filled with gladness for Earth's sake". Kapilavastu wore a festive look. The King invited wise men from distant corners of India to attend the celebration. Among them was Asita, the revered saint. As soon as Asita saw the child, he fell on his feet and hailed the Prince as the long-awaited saviour. "Know, O King", said Asita,

"This is that blossom on our human tree  
Which opens once in many myriad years—  
But opened, fills the World with Wisdom's scent  
And Love's dropped honey; from thy royal root  
A Heavenly Lotus springs: Ah, happy House!..."

But the king's happiness was marred by the prophecy that the Prince would renounce his home and go forth in search of wisdom. On the seventh day after delivering the child, Queen Māyā died in her sleep. The Prince—who had been given the name of Siddhārtha—was entrusted to the care of Mahāprajāpati who became his foster mother.

In the remainder of Book I, Siddhārtha's childhood is described: his amazing progress in education and his skill in all the arts and sciences; his compassion towards all living beings; his brooding over the universal nature of suffering; and the occasional miracles through which he revealed his divine essence. There are some poignant lines about Siddhārtha's dispute with his cruel cousin, Devadatta, over the ownership of a wounded swan. Devadatta had shot down the swan with his arrow and claimed the bird by virtue of the traditional 'hunter's right'. But Siddhārtha, who had nursed it back to life, refused to surrender the swan to Devadatta. "The bird is mine", he said.

"The first of myriad things which shall be mine  
By right of mercy and love's lordliness.  
For now I know, by what within me stirs,  
That I shall teach compassion unto men."

Book II opens with a vivid account of the palace which the King had built for Siddhārtha, now in his eighteenth year. No effort or expense was spared to surround him with luxuries, so that gloomy thoughts may not enter his mind. But the plan did not succeed.

The King sought the advice of his senior advisers, who said:

“...Maharajah! Love  
Will cure these thin distempers: weave the spell  
Of woman's wiles about his idle heart...  
The thoughts ye cannot stay with brazen chains  
A girl's hair lightly binds...”

And so it was decided to find a bride for Siddhārtha. All the lovely maidens of Kapilavastu were invited to a festival, and the Prince awarded prizes to them. When Yashodharā, the fairest of them all came to claim her prize, Siddhārtha gave her his own emerald necklace. The King was happy to see the spark of love kindled in his son's heart.

A tournament was held at which the bravest and most handsome heroes of the realm competed for Yashodharā's hand. Siddhārtha emerged victorious in all the contests. The wedding was performed according to the traditional rites. The King now felt optimistic that Siddhārtha would give up all thoughts of renouncing worldly pleasures. Yet he did not trust love alone; he erected a new palace of unsurpassed splendour, “a pleasant prison-house where love was gaoler and delights its bars”. Attendants, musicians and dancers were selected carefully, so that there may not be the slightest trace of ugliness. The King commanded that no mention of sickness, old age or pain should be made within the walls of Siddhārtha's palace.

As an example of Arnold's descriptive powers, I quote the following lines about the Himalayas which provided the backdrop for the new palace:

“...Northward soared  
The stainless ramps of huge Himalaya's wall  
Ranged in white ranks against the blue—untrod,  
Infinite, wonderful—whose uplands vast,  
And lifted universe of crest and crag,  
Shoulder and shelf, green slope and icy horn,  
Riven ravine and splintered precipice  
Led climbing thought higher and higher, until  
It seemed to stand in heaven and speak with gods...”

Immersed in conjugal bliss, Siddhārtha allowed himself for a while to forget the woes of the world. But the *devas* in heaven reminded him of his mission. They whispered into his ears:

“We are the voices of the wandering wind,  
Which moan for rest and rest can never find;

Lo! as the wind is so is mortal life:  
 A moan, a sigh, a sob, a storm, a strife...  
 The blind world stumbleth on its round of pain;  
 Rise, Māyā's child! wake! slumber not again!

Roused from his langour, Siddhārtha expressed a desire to go beyond the palace grounds and see the city and the countryside. The King agreed, and made elaborate preparations to ensure that the Prince saw nothing but pleasant sights.

Siddhārtha rode forth, accompanied by Channa, his faithful attendant. In Book III Arnold gives a dramatic account of the witnessing of the Signs of Suffering: the old man, the sick man, and the dead man. At each experience, Siddhārtha turned to Channa and asked whether all living beings were subject to these miseries. Channa told him the bitter truth: youth must turn into old age, health to illness; and where there is life there must some day be death. Siddhārtha now realised that everything in the phenomenal world is permeated by sorrow: *sarvam khalvidam dukham*. "I see, I feel", he said.

"The vastness of the agony of earth,  
 The vainness of its joys, the mockery  
 Of all its best, the anguish of its worst;  
 Since pleasures end in pain, and youth in age,  
 And love in loss, and life in hateful death,  
 And death in unknown lives, which will but yoke  
 Men to their wheel again to whirl the round  
 Of false delights... The veil is rent  
 Which blinded me."

Seeing him relapse into a melancholy mood, and afraid that he would leave the palace, King Shuddhodhana tripled the guard at the gate. New diversions were introduced in the palace and stricter precautions were taken to keep the Prince away from unpleasant sights and sounds. But these measures were of no avail. The ground was being prepared, inexorably, for the Great Renunciation. In Book IV Arnold describes Siddhārtha's revulsion at the sight of the dancing girls as they slept on the floor, overcome by the fatigue of their performance. This is followed by Yashodharā's dreams in which she had premonitions of being parted from her Lord. Siddhārtha comforted and consoled her but firmly refused to promise that he would not leave her. Finally, on the night of the full moon in Vaishākha, he made the resolve: "I will depart. The hour is come". The stars

in the firmament seemed to proclaim:

“...This is the night! Choose thou  
The way of greatness or the way of good:  
To reign a King of kings, or wander lone,  
Crownless and homeless, that the world be helped.”

Having made the choice, Siddhārtha entered his bedchamber and gazed upon Yashodharā as she slept. He “bent the farewell of fond eyes, unutterable, upon her sleeping face, still wet with tears”. He was ready for the ‘great going forth’.

“Then into the night Siddhārtha passed: its eyes,  
The watchful stars, looked love on him: its breath,  
The wandering wind, kissed his robe’s fluttered fringe;  
The garden-blossoms, folded for the dawn,  
Opened their velvet hearts to waft him scents  
From pink and purple censers: O’er the land,  
From Himalay unto the Indian Sea,  
A tremor spread, as if earth’s soul beneath  
Stirred with an unknown hope...”

Channa, the ever-faithful attendant, saddled Kantaka, the Prince’s favourite horse. Kantaka neighed loudly, but the *devas* laid their unseen wings over the ears of the guards. The heavy gates opened miraculously. Siddhārtha, his attendant and horse passed silently into the world outside the palace. When they reached the Anomā river, Siddhārtha doffed his royal robe, his jewels and his sword. He asked Channa to carry these things back to King Shuddodhana, with the message:

“Siddhārtha prays forget him till he come  
Ten times a prince, with royal wisdom won  
With lonely searchings and the strife for light...  
And none hath sought for this as I will seek  
Who cast away my world to save my world.”

Book V opens with an account of Siddhārtha’s intensive preparation for attaining the highest truth. He who had been brought up in the lap of luxury now subjected himself to privations. He lived in seclusion, absorbed in his inward search, oblivious of the world around him. Sometimes he wandered, visiting holy men as a humble student. During his wanderings he came upon a group of ascetics,

"a gaunt and mournful band, dwelling apart". These ascetics believed that mortification of the body was the only way to liberation. Siddhārtha asked their leader why they lived "so piteously self-anguished", adding fresh ills to life which was already so painful. The leader of the ascetics said:

"It is written if a man shall mortify  
His flesh, till pain be grown the life he lives  
And death voluptuous rest, such woes shall purge  
Sin's dross away, and the soul, purified,  
Soar from the furnace of its sorrow, winged  
For glorious spheres and splendour past all thought!"

Siddhārtha argued against extreme asceticism and pointed out the futility of torturing one's own body in the hope of perfecting the soul.

"Onward he passed", dressed in a yellow robe, alms-bowl in hand. At one place, where the King had ordered the slaughter of a herd of goats as a sacrificial offering at a temple, Siddhārtha intervened and saved the animals. Once a woman came to him, weeping and wailing, with a dying child in her arms, and beseeched him to revive her baby. He promised to try, and instructed her to bring from the village a *tola* of black mustard-seed, adding—as she was about to leave—that the seed should not come from a house where any one had died. After some time the woman returned and said:

"Ah, Sir! I could not find a single house  
Where there was mustard-seed and none had died!"

The Compassionate One consoled her:

"My sister! thou hast found", the Master said  
"Searching for what none finds—that bitter balm  
I had to give thee... today  
Thou knowest the whole wide world weeps with thy woe:  
The grief which all hearts share grows less for one."

For six years the Buddha-to-be continued his search, now in solitude, now in the midst of simple village folk. Finally he reached the region of Uravilva (Gaya) where he was to attain Mahābodhi, the Great Enlightenment. Book VI of *The Light of Asia* is devoted to this climactic event. A sizable portion of this book deals with Siddhārtha's pre-Enlightenment exertions, which left him so exhausted that he thought he would not survive:

"Mine eyes are dim now that they see the truth,  
 My strength is waned now that my need is most;  
 Would that I had such help as man must have,  
 For I shall die, whose life was all men's hope."

Help came to him unexpectedly. Sujātā, "a pearl of womanhood", had prepared a delicious and nourishing meal of rice, milk and honey as an offering to the diety of the forest. She saw Siddhārtha sitting in the shade of a tree and, sensing his divine nature, offered the meal to him. The Prince ate it with great relish and felt his strength return. He blessed Sujātā, and bent his footsteps

"With measured pace, steadfast, majestic,  
 Unto the Tree of Wisdom."

All nature rejoiced as the Prince passed into the ample shade of the Bodhi Tree. The earth "worshipped with waving grass and sudden flush of flowers". From the river "sighed cool wafts of wind laden with lotus-scents breathed by the water-gods". "Large wondering eyes of woodland creatures, at peace that eve, gazed upon his face benign from cave and thicket". Then began the epic struggle between Siddhārtha and Māra—the Lord of Darkness—who tried to shake the Prince's resolve. Māra called to his aid all the powers that abhor Wisdom and Light, all the passions and sins and ignorances. He enlisted the support of Lust, Envy, Greed, Hatred and Doubt. But the Mighty Seeker remained firm in his meditation. Having failed to tempt Siddhārtha by promises of glory, fame, riches and power, Māra tried to frighten him. He called forth thunder, lightning, flood and earthquake until "the rooted mountains shook, wild winds howled, stars shot from heaven" and the earth shuddered.

"...But Buddha heeded not,  
 Sitting serene, with perfect virtue walled...  
 Also the Sacred Tree—the Bodhi Tree—  
 Amid that tumult stirred not, but each leaf  
 Glistened as still as when on moonlit eves  
 No zephyr spills the glittering gems of dew  
 For all this clamour raged outside the shade  
 Spread by those cloistered stems..."

Māra was vanquished. Siddhārtha continued his inward quest undisturbed. In the fourth watch of the night the Noble Truths came

to him: the truth of universal suffering; of the twelve *nidānas*, from ignorance (*avidyā*) through craving (*trishnā*) to *jāti* (birth) and sorrow of old age and death (*jarā-marana*); of the excellent Middle Way by which craving can be conquered; and of *Nirvāna*, the state of unutterable bliss. The whole universe was filled with joy. Then the Prince rose from his seat under the Bodhi Tree, "radiant, rejoicing, strong". *Siddhārtha* had become the Buddha, the Enlightened, the Illumined.

In Book VII Arnold takes us back to *Kapilavastu* where King *Shuddhodhanā* grieved for his son. Far more agonising was the sorrow of *Yashodharā*. "Her lids were wan with tears, her tender cheeks had thinned. Her lips' delicious curves were drawn with grief...Slow moved, and painfully, those small fine feet which had the roe's gait and the rose-leaf's fall". Her only source of solace was her son, *Rāhula*, now seven years old. Years had rolled by, and she had waited and waited. At last came the word that a company of Holy Brethren was approaching the city. *Yashodharā* went in her litter to the palace gate and saw the monks, walking slowly, pausing now and again at the doors of humble citizens with their bowls held out. They were led by one who

"...so lordly seemed  
So reverend, and with such a passage moved,  
With so commanding presence filled the air,  
And with such sweet eyes of holiness smote all,  
That as they reached him alms the givers gazed  
Awestruck upon his face, and some bent down  
In worship, and some ran to fetch fresh gifts".

*Yashodharā* fell at his feet, sobbing. The Master explained to her that "the greater beareth with the lesser love". They entered the palace. The King was shocked to see his son clad in a coarse yellow garment, his head shorn, with bare feet, carrying an alms-bowl. He asked:

"Son! why is this?" "My father" came reply,  
"It is the custom of my race". "Thy race"  
Answered the King, "counteth a hundred thrones  
From *Maha Samrat*, but no deed like this".  
"Not of a mortal line", the Master said,  
"I spake, but of descent invisible,  
The Buddhas who have been and who shall be:  
Of these am I, and what they did I do".



Arnold concludes his story in Book VIII with an account of the Buddha's reception at Kapilavastu and his discourse on the Way of Righteousness leading to Nirvāna. Reunited with his family—not in the relationship of son, husband or father, but as Teacher and Healer—the Buddha spoke calmly, gently.

“...Upon the King's right hand  
He sate, and round were ranged the Sākya Lords...  
Rāhula smiled with wondering, childish eyes  
..., while at his feet  
Sate sweet Yashodharā, her heartaches gone,  
Foreseeing that fair love which doth not feed  
On fleeting sense, that life which knows no age,  
That blessed last of deaths when Death is dead.”

The *devas* and other celestial beings heard the Buddha's words with joy. Nature's forces were enthralled.

“...the daylight lingered past its time  
In rose-leaf radiance on the watching peaks,  
So that it seemed night listened in the glens,  
And noon upon the mountains...”

The lowliest of sentient beings absorbed the Buddha's message :

“The birds and beasts and creeping things—it is writ—  
Had sense of Buddha's vast embracing love  
And took the promise of his piteous speech.”

The Enlightened One discoursed on the inexorable and universal Law of Karma. But he also asserted the reality of Freedom and Progress:

“Ye are not bound! The soul of things is sweet,  
The Heart of Being is celestial rest;  
Stronger than woe is will : that which was good  
Doth pass to Better—and Best.”

He spoke of Impermanence, Change and Causation, in nature and in human life, which must be accepted as facts :

“Stars sweep and question not. This is enough  
That life and death and joy and woe abide;  
And cause and sequence, and the course of time,

And Being's ceaseless tide,

Which, ever-changing, runs linked like a river  
By ripples following ripples, fast or slow—  
The same yet not the same—from far-off fountain  
To where its waters flow..."

As for the highest Reality, it must forever elude the human mind. We can neither define it through concepts nor communicate it through words :

"OM, AMITAYA, measure not with words  
The Immeasurable; nor sink the string of thought  
Into the Fathomless. Who asks doth err,  
Who answers, errs. Say nought!...

Shall any gazer see with mortal eyes,  
Or any searcher know by mortal mind?  
Veil after veil will lift—but there must be  
Veil upon veil behind."

Recognizing the futility of speculation about the nature of the Real, the man of wisdom treads the noble and uplifting path of Dhamma. Self-perfection is possible only through Dhamma:

"The heart of it is Love, the end of it  
Is Peace and Consummation sweet..."

By cultivating sympathy and compassion for all sentient beings, by leading a life of moderation, gentleness and humility, the Pilgrim who treads the path of Dhamma attains the highest Reality which is identical with Liberation, Peace and Joy.

"...He goes  
Unto NIRVĀNA. He is one with life  
Yet lives not. He is blest, ceasing to be.  
OM, MANI PADME, OM! the Dewdrop slips  
Into the shining sea!"

# Caste and Modernization in India Today

*Nirmal Sengupta*

To a foreigner the traditional village society in India appears to be a peculiar organisation where the population regards themselves divided in distinct groups enjoying different social dignities and practising elaborate restrictions about inter-group dining and drinking. When the Portuguese reached the West coast of India, they had noted this division and called it *casta*—meaning ‘breed’ in their own language—because of the hereditary nature of this distinction. From then, the name ‘caste’ came into use, to signify this social division. The Indians name the division *jati*, a word which also means ‘race’.

Customs related to the *jati* system are practised by the Hindus even to this date. Some are orthodox, some others are liberated to the extent as to honour only the endogamous restriction of that system. The practice is almost universal among the Hindus. Yet, in some sense their familiarity with the system is only one step more than that of the foreigners. When an individual moves to an adjacent province, or even within the same province, the elaborate knowledge of the caste customs and caste hierarchies he had gained throughout his lifetime, may be of little use in understanding the prevalent system in the new area.

The essentials of the *jati* system in its typical form may be outlined as having three components—hereditary occupation and social status, affinity within caste and hatred between castes and social organisation overlapping on the village organisation. In practice, change of occupation from the one fixed by *jati* is rather accepted. But the violation of marital and hierarchical customs are strongly

had embraced Hinduism as a way to enlightenment, were very soon disillusioned by the humiliations they had received as lower castes and reverted to the tribal culture. Probably certain lower caste people who had strengthened their economic positions by some means or other had aspired, and were sanctioned, higher caste status, being allowed to practice some of the customs reserved for the higher caste. This second phenomenon has been termed as *Sanskritisation* (Sanskrit—the ancient language in which the religious books were written: *Sanskriti*—culture) by the famous sociologist M.N. Srinivas. Documented evidences of revivalism (among extra-tribal castes) and *Sanskritisation* in the middle ages are rare. Yet it can be said for certain, that these three religious moves—conversion, revivalism and *Sanskritisation*—were the only outlets available to those who wanted to escape the caste oppression. All these three methods have been used extensively in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when the social consciousness against the evils of the system has risen very high. In addition to these old ones, the new avenue of modern social and political activities has registered many a successful protest in this century.

The spread of western education, the scope of economic upliftment in the non-traditional way and the occasional supporting legislations by the government, gave the first impetus to caste reforms. The early reformers of the nineteenth century like Rammohan, Vivekanand, Dayanand or Ranade, had campaigned for such reforms as the spread of English education, imposing a ban on the ghastly custom of immolation of widows, popularisation of the remarriage of widows, restricting child marriage, or lifting of social restriction on overseas travel. Although the pioneers were concerned with Hindu society as a whole, in due course the young English-educated youth in many parts of the country had followed their teachings and undertook the task of reform within their respective castes alone, for the obvious reason indicated earlier that caste *Panchayats* were the most important social organisation in Hindu society. To mention only one such example, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of independent India, had the first experience of participating in a social movement when the younger men of his caste forced the elderly ones to accept overseas travel as a matter of no objection. The kinship type of feeling that exists among the same caste men has motivated many reformers inspired by the ideas of social reform to undertake developmental tasks, like spread of education, for their own caste men alone.

Upto the end of the nineteenth century the caste reforms and caste conflicts were confined to certain local pockets. During the first

quarter of the twentieth century, three events turned them into a mass phenomenon: The three events were the Census Operations, the development of class struggles in the countryside and the emergence of the able leadership of Gandhi in the nationalist movement of India.

For the first time, information regarding the caste names of individuals was collected during the Fourth Census Operations, in the year 1901. The enumerations returned as many as 2378 different castes and tribes all over India. Naturally, the question of categorisation propped up. Thus, the Census Operations on the one hand, induced every individual to become conscious of his caste status and, on the other hand, extended the scope of disputes regarding hierarchy between every caste. For categorisation the method first attempted, was to establish correspondence of each *jati* with one or the other of the four ancient *varnas*. The result was that for example, the white-collar writer caste enjoying high social status was placed in the third grade as *Vaishya* along with the peasant and artisan castes, enough to cause much heart-burning for the writer caste who were already enjoying a high social status. Some other middle-ranking castes were categorised as *Sudras* along with the untouchable castes. They too were equally agitated. The Census Officers received hundreds of applications from various castes and tribes—the weights of those applications exceeding hundreds of pounds—with requests for revision of the status assigned to them. The usual pattern followed in those actions was to search for some famous character in the ancient books who had followed an occupation, similar to their own, yet enjoyed a high social status—and to claim themselves as the descendants of that famous man. Since suppression by the caste system was not so acute in the very ancient times, such characters were not difficult to find. Along with these applications, usually some more steps were taken for improving the caste status, e.g. assuming upper caste titles, wearing the thread, a prerogative of the *Brahmins*, etc. These moves became very widespread during the first part of the twentieth century and brought the caste *Panchayats* to the modern social process. Earlier, these *Panchayats* were functioning mostly locally. The Census categorisation enabled them to identify other castes, pursuing similar occupations, in different parts of the country. Thereafter, various castes from different parts of the country combined to form caste organisations of their own. They retained their differences in traditional functions like marriage, but began to act as one caste in modern social and political affairs. It has even enabled several different castes of the same locality to unite. Enumeration of castes excepting for the Scheduled

Castes, has been stopped since independence. But the 'great' castes formed in the meantime, are operative even to this date.

The second factor that helped the development of caste movement was the rising tempo of class struggles in the country-side. The economic mobility that was allowed under the colonial rule had shattered the parity between the economic status and caste status which was essential for the continuation of the domination of one caste over another. Those members of the lower castes, who could improve their economic conditions, began aspiring for higher social status and naturally rallied the whole caste to demand the same. The Justice Movement in Madras, for example, which began in the late nineteenth century with the object of delivering non-*Brahmins* from subjection to *Brahmins* in social and religious matters, eventually became so powerful that its political wing, the Justice Party, won the majority of seats in the provincial council in 1918 and formed their ministry. That too was another important reason for the steady increase of the *Sanskritisation* type movements, during the first half of this century. In the areas settled under the *Zamindary* system (mainly Eastern India), there was a more direct reason. The Tenancy Acts, passed during the late nineteenth century, defined the powers of the *zamindars* and thereby made scope for the development of tenant struggles everywhere. Following the legislation, *zamindar*-tenant relations had deteriorated steadily throughout the *Zamindary* area. In Bihar in particular, where the *zamindar*-tenant division used to correspond more or less to upper and middle caste division, the first expression of assertion by the tenants was to denounce the social superiority of the *zamindars*, by the same *Sanskritisation* type of movement. Along with wearing the sacred and assuming upper caste titles, the middle caste tenants also had stopped bowing to the *zamindars*. There were many caste riots. But ultimately the upper caste landlords had to reconcile. In due course these tenants were organised under *Kisan Sabha* (peasant organisation) and demanded the abolition of the *Zamindary* system, a demand that was fulfilled after independence.

By the cumulative efforts of the social reforms, *Sanskritisation* efforts, anti-Brahmin movements, spread of education, spread of western values and the economic mobilities, the middle-ranking castes were, to a great extent, emancipated from the severity of caste oppression by the higher castes. Thus, when the country became independent their major problem was their depressed economic legacy of the past—due to which, they were yet far behind their reasonable share in the modern polity. The later history of these castes is one of gradual rise—in the field of education, in services

and professions, even in politics. For example the upper castes—who had so long dominated the Bihar State Legislative Assembly—were reduced to a minority for the first time during 1967. The traditional caste *Panchayats*, even if alive, are least active. The modern caste organisations are functional more than ever, although with mixed purpose. On the one hand, the organised efforts have been more helpful for the middle castes to fulfil their aspirations, on the other hand those have often been political levers in the hands of the rich people among the middle castes. Recently, the middle castes in Bihar have raised a demand for the reservation of certain proportion of government services for them. While the demand appears to be justified when one considers the fact that they are actually ill-represented in those services, it is also true, that by such reservation, only the rich and the educated among them will benefit at the cost of poorer—sometimes very poor—aspirants from upper castes. Caste organisation needs to be welcomed only as long as they do not override class considerations in the distribution of welfare. The large majority of the middle caste people have not yet been emancipated. But the social question has already been undermined—the task that needs prime attention today is the task of their economic upliftment.

What has been written about the middle castes so far, has not been true for the lowest castes variously called the 'untouchables' or 'ex-untouchables', 'depressed classes', 'exterior castes', 'Scheduled Castes' or '*Harijans*' (children of God). They were too far down in the economic ladder to achieve any substantial progress in that field even to this date. In addition, once being *Sanskritised* and organised, many of the middle castes exhibit increased caste hatred against the *Harijans* making the process of their upliftment more difficult. The third important factor of the twentieth century—the reorientation of the style of work in national politics—has been the major influencing factor in the emancipation of *Harijan* communities—a process which has not yet been completed. Indeed, the process of their emancipation has been closely associated with missionary zeal of the two great leaders of modern India—Gandhiji and Dr. Ambedkar.

The process of self-emancipation of the untouchable communities had begun as early as in the late nineteenth century in local pockets, as in the case of the *Ezhavas* in Kerala, under the able leadership of Narayana Guru (1854-1928). But it was not until Dr. Ambedkar's emergence, that it became a powerful All-India phenomenon. Born in 1891 to a *Mahad* (an untouchable caste) family in Maharashtra, Ambedkar could not hope to receive a good standard of education, leave alone the high standard he ultimately

attained. Maharaja Gaekwad, the feudal chief of Baroda feudatory State, being a *Marhatta* (caste of Maharashtra) ruler of a Gujarati state appointed by the British without much local sanction, was by the force of circumstances, a tacit ruler eager to win the favour of certain sections among his subjects. He had established an Institute and extended scholarships to the promising students among the Depressed Classes. Being aided by such a scholarship, Ambedkar went to the U.S.A. in the year 1913 and then to England for higher studies. He got an M.A. degree in Economics, then was awarded Ph.D., D.Sc. and finally a Barrister's diploma. In the year 1923 he returned to India and spent the rest of his life fighting for the cause of the untouchables.

Gandhi, born in the year 1869 in Gujarat and himself a Barrister, had many similarities to Ambedkar except that he was born to a middle caste family. The Congress Party established in 1896 confined itself to the work of framing a few resolutions each year, until Gandhiji had taken up the task of transforming it into an active organisation. Under his leadership the Congress became a regular organisation of full-time activists; they began to initiate agitations and transformed from an elite based organisation to a real mass organisation. Although it is true, that almost all the social reformers had condemned the system of untouchability as the worst evil of Hindu society, Gandhiji was the first to begin a programme of action involving the whole society for the eradication of the hated custom.

The year 1917 is significant in the process of emancipation of the untouchables in many ways: Gandhiji through his struggles at Champaran, indicated to the Congress how the Party should associate itself with the cause of the peasantry; the same year, under his influence, the Congress Party shook off its long standing policy of avoiding the sentiments of the upper caste people and adopted, for the first time, a resolution urging "the necessity of justice and righteousness or removing of disability imposed by customs on the untouchables". In the same year Dr. Ambedkar made his entry into politics by appearing before the Franchise Committee in order to argue the case of the untouchables. Being warned by the rising revolutionary tide since the beginning of the twentieth century, the British was pursuing the 'divide and rule' policy with increasing earnestness. The untouchables, once some of whom were named 'criminal castes', received pseudo-sympathetic consideration by being termed then as 'exterior castes' to the Hindu society. The encouragement given by government at this stage had obviously been of help for the untouchable castes to assert themselves. Thus in 1920 the First All-India



Conference of the Untouchables was arranged in Nagpur. At the same time Gandhiji declared that "Untouchability cannot be given a secondary place in the (Congress) programme. Without the removal of that trait *Swaraj* (freedom) is a meaningless term".

Throughout the nineteen-twenties there occurred several important struggles by the untouchable communities asserting their rights. The most famous have been the Vykom *Satyagraha* (1924) in Kerala, for throwing the temple streets open to the untouchable castes, *Mahad Tank Satyagraha* (March, 1927) organised by Dr. Ambedkar for the rights of drawing drinking water from tanks, or Kalaram Temple Entry movement (March, 1930) at Nasik, organised by Ambedkar and participated in by 15,000 volunteers from the untouchable castes. As many as 18 different Depressed Class Associations were found to exist in 1927 when they gave evidence before the Simon Commission.

By the early thirties the nationalist movement in India had reached lofty heights. The colonial government thereafter, proposed to undertake certain administrative reforms, granting more power to the Indians. But at the same time, they took a stern attitude towards the Congress Party and the British Prime Minister announced unilaterally, the notorious 'Communal Award' formula proposing separate electorates for Muslims, Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, European communities and Depressed Classes (i.e. mostly the untouchable castes). The patriotic forces in India were pushed trickily into an awkward corner. They were asked to pay the penalty for the crime rooted in tradition. Ambedkar supported the formula, for he thought—and rightly so—that in the joint electorate the oppressive and dominating higher caste Hindus would never let the untouchable castes rise to any level. Gandhi opposed the Award, once again on the fully justified ground, that it was a cunning attempt to create rifts even within the Hindu society and would have grave and dangerous significance in the future. However, the Indian patriots themselves looked for a way out. The famous Poona Pact was signed on the 24th September 1932 between the Congress under the leadership of Gandhiji and the Depressed Classes under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar. The demand for separate electorate for the Depressed Classes was withdrawn in favour of a joint effort by all parties for the upliftment of the untouchable castes. The week beginning from 27th September, was declared as the Untouchability Abolition Week all over the country. On the 30th of September 1932, the All India Anti-Untouchability League, later renamed *Harijan Sewak Sangh* (Association for serving the Scheduled Castes) was formed with many low caste men as its members. With-

in a short time the Sangh had spread its branches all over the country, and organised many such programmes as inter-dining between castes, opening of schools, extending scholarships, digging wells for drinking water, etc. for the untouchable castes. Gandhiji himself toured throughout India urging the abolition of the evil custom. In many a place he was ill-treated by orthodox upper caste Hindus.

But the joint action programme was short lived. Very soon Gandhiji lifted the whole issue to religious heights and drifted away from practical works. Ambedkar too felt bitter for certain reasons and severed his connections with the *Harijan Sewak Sangh*. Yet, in spite of the rift, both Gandhi and Ambedkar were successful in inspiring thousands of people from all castes to rise in revolt against the age-old vice. In the Legislative House in Madras and Delhi Temple-Entry Bills were discussed as early as in 1932. In 1936 the feudatory State of Travancore passed the Temple-Entry Proclamation. In 1938 the Madras Legislature passed the Civil Disabilities Act and a Temple Entry Act. During the 1937 Election the Congress Party fought in alliance with the Depressed Classes and attracted young leaders like Jagjivan Ram from among them. The social climate was extremely helpful to the untouchable castes in taking initiatives for spread of education among themselves, *Sanskritisation* and other upliftment programmes. Exhaustive records of such attempts are not available, but fragmentary evidences of such attempts throughout the forties are available all over the country.

And then in 1947 when the country became independent and Jawaharlal Nehru undertook the responsibility of heading the new government, he too had shown the same thoughtful consideration. In spite of the fact that Dr. Ambedkar did not belong to the ruling Congress Party, Nehru placed the national interests over the party interest and invited him to be the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the new Constitution as well as to become the Law Minister in the First Cabinet of Independent India. The Constitution of India abolished untouchability (Article 17). In 1955, the Untouchability (Offences) Act was passed, making the practice a criminal offence. Other facilities, like educational facilities, reservation of posts in government services and educational institutions, reservation of seats in Assembly and Parliament, etc. were made. The *Harijan Sewak Sangh* was given official recognition and financial help to complete its mission. Throughout the fifties the government officials in different districts had actively helped the Scheduled Castes to realise their rights in entering temples, or collecting water from public water sources. As a result of these efforts caste oppression has definitely weakened—still it is miles away from effecting the complete abolition

of the custom which has a history of more than a thousand years. But the way the makers of modern India have behaved makes one hopeful of a brighter future society.

The Scheduled Castes today know that they too have rights and privileges, dignity and social standing, as much as the rest of the citizens of secular India. The wretched of the castes are no more as timid and submissive as they were in earlier times. They have learnt to demand justice for themselves. The Scheduled Castes are predominantly landless agricultural labourers by occupation, i.e. engaged in that occupation which is by far the most unattractive. Being encouraged by the mass of legislative measures undertaken in the recent years for the improvement of the conditions of agricultural labourers, that class has begun demanding better wages and better living conditions throughout the country. When the labourer is a middle caste man he may be dealt with by the employer with mixed consideration; but when there is a wide gulf in the social status of the employer and the employee, any such demand made by the labourer is conceived by the landlords as the height of audacity, which deserves drastic action.

Thanks to the long-standing efforts for their social development, the potentially doubly-submissive *Harijan*-cum-agricultural labourer has come forward today to assert himself. In the twenties and thirties the caste movements among the middle castes were transformed into the class struggles of the tenant class. The same story is being repeated today with respect to the lowest castes and the agricultural labourer class.

# Book Reviews

*Science, Yoga and Theosophy:* Theosophical Publishing House, Madras; Pp. 262; 1977

The book under review is a collection of papers presented at the Theosophy Science Seminar held on the occasion of the Centenary International Convention of the Theosophical Society at Adyar, Madras in 1976. The aim was to mobilise and reassess the efforts of the members of the society to 'understand, propagate and live Theosophy in the modern world'. One of the main themes chosen for this important anniversary was that of theosophical research and studies in science to draw the attention of modern thinking people to the work of the Theosophical Society today and to bring out the relevance of modern science and thought to the principles of ancient wisdom or theosophy and vice versa. This unity of purpose is delineated through the study of science, its philosophy and the problems caused by

technology. "These deliberations are important because they serve as a bridge between the occult and the scientific fields" and "the marriage of Theosophy and Science which had been going on throughout the century especially through the efforts of Theosophical World Trust for Education and Research is meant for the constructive betterment of mankind".

Science is thought of usually in connection with problem solving situations. But the fact that science creates very many problems was thought of clearly hundred years ago by Madame H.P. Blavatsky and if this gap between problem solving and problem creating was to be bridged, then Madame Blavatsky's work had to be continued further. She severely criticised materialism and in the past century we have seen that science had no longer based

its world view upon this philosophy. There are 'Black holes' in the universe in which matter as conceived by physical scientists does not exist. It is a mystery to the scientist and non-scientist alike, and it is only symptomatic of the many phases through which the scientific outlook has passed. Theosophical studies have traced this course. John Taylor in his book **BLACK-HOLES—THE END OF THE UNIVERSE** says that the black-hole itself is quite easy to understand. Stars of a certain size called collaspers, have a tendency to diminish in size, pulled inwards by their own gravity; as they do so, they become denser, the gravity field becomes more concentrated, and they are pulled towards their own centre more powerfully, becoming so dark that a match-box could weigh a ton or more. If the conditions are right, the star eventually becomes so dense that nothing not even light itself, can escape from it. Everything nearby is sucked in through a one way membrane, as Taylor puts it. Light can enter but not get out; so this peculiar object looks black; in fact there is nothing blacker than black-hole. John Taylor suggests that many black-holes may be wandering around the universe, drawing into them everything in reach, so it is possible that in the course of time the entire universe would sink into one black-hole.

Still more stupefying is the contention outlined by Benson Herbert that under certain conditions space and time would be interchanged, and it is even possible that as you fall through the boundaries of a blackhole, you meet another "you" coming out. Under other conditions, the energy pouring into the blackhole could emerge into a parallel universe as a "whitehole" pouring out its pent-up energy. Any one unlucky enough to fall into the exact center of a black-hole, would shrink to a point without any size at all, an interesting but probably uncomfortable situation.

The second aspect of the synthesis they have been able to arrive at is the clear enunciation and positive statement that intelligence is primal in the universe, which is a long way from the position held by science 100 years ago.

The third aspect of bridging the divergent ways of science concerns man himself. The science of psychical research was in its infancy when Madame Blavatsky demonstrated her psychic powers and invited strong criticism. But now we know that such criticism was not well-founded. Still she cautioned against errors in the experimental approach to the superphysical with much forethought. Now we are able to interpret the occult explosion in the right perspective because of the foundations she

laid. The dedicated life of Madame Blavatsky was indeed a life of such 'spiritualised action' so magnificently advocated by the sages of ancient India. Disinterested service which is the cardinal principle of theosophy is the active aspect of the ideal of Brotherhood of Man which forms the nucleus of theosophical teaching. The theosophists have discussed how far this basic principle and that of the existence

of One Ultimate Reality of which we are merely so many centers of consciousness can be achieved through theosophy and science. The book discusses many other fascinating aspects under three divisions—'Social Implications of Sciences', 'Some Aspects of Theosophy and Science', 'Yoga and Religious Experience in the light of Modern Scholarship' and makes an extremely interesting and enlightening reading for all.

*Into the Fourth Dimension* : A.C. Hanlon. Theosophical Publishing House, Madras; Pp. 83

This is a collection of articles and extracts of the author's contributions to various theosophist journals and discusses the interpretation of the four dimensional space continuum which has since the first decade of the twentieth century, exercised a great influence on philosophy. Speculation on the philosophical problem of space and time has occupied philosophers in both East and West for long. But they always thought of time and space as media through which the phenomenal world has developed and come to be what it is. The primal stuff of the universe was conceived as some form of substance which was not itself space-time though it existed in space and time. In the philosophy of Samuel Alexander, Space-Time is hypostatized into primal matter. Though Alexander's idea of

Space-Time is closely connected with that of physics, he says that the method which brought him to the same result was not that of physics or mathematics but "purely metaphysical, a piece of plodding analysis". Alexander wishes his concept of Space-Time to be understood in a thoroughly metaphysical sense and confesses his inability to enter upon an inquiry as to the agreement or discrepancy between it and the theories of relativity.

For those who live in three dimensional continuum, 'All attempts to visualise the fourth dimension are futile' and "The fourth dimension is unknowable", according to P.D. Ouspensky, well known for his *Tertium Organum* and *A New Model of the Universe*.

The inward urge of the author to search for a 'fourth dimension'

came as a mystic element at the age of seventeen. His attempt to realise the concept took the form of geometrical figures through which 'higher space be fully experienced in a moment of time, if not sustained for a longer period.' Though his attempt to visualise the fourth dimensional space through 'tesseract' did not meet with complete success, it brought him certain mystic experiences in the form of 'bright lights and colours flashing about him, and strange warm or electric pressures especially on top of his head, but at that stage he never managed to stabilise the complete four-dimensional form in his mind.'

All our perceptual experiences are bound with the three dimensional space and can be visualised through what is known as 'pure awareness' as stated by J. Krishnamurti. The fact that there is an inner urge in us to intuit the fourth dimension through our 'transempirical experiences' provides the clue that its existence, transcends the boundaries of the three dimensions.

The author extends the same argument to expound the concept of Time which is the fourth dimension. In this regard he argues that the universe which exists in three dimensional space also exists simultaneously in time, the difference between the two being that the former is objectified where the latter is not. If one could give "objectivity of space"

to Time, we could then see the "Einsteinian continuum as timeless four dimensional design in which the distinguishing shapes would not be globes as three dimensional space, but spirals of globular cross sections interwoven throughout a four dimensional space to form a pattern of mysterious beauty".

The author seems to conclude that the experience of 'illimitable space' could either be achieved "by adding on dimension after dimension to our minds or forsake the mental process and discover the essence of space in ourselves". The first method seems to be the favourite of the scientists while the latter is the favourite of the mystics. Relative consciousness refers to space and time, timelessness to absolute consciousness. Timelessness in other words is 'immortal' and transcendental.

The author's concept of the realisation of the fourth dimensional universe by explaining the essence of one's own self, reminds one of the analogy given in the Mundakopanishad about the creation of the universe: just as the spider weaves a web out of its own body, so also Brahman creates the universe out of Himself. Thus the knowledge of the self according to the Upanishadic teaching, results in 'understanding the Self'. Mystic experience is translated into geometrical figures and mathematical conceptions, which is no small achievement.

This learned work is of great documentary value for the study of the recent concept of the Fourth Dimension.

*The Bhagavadgita : God's Revealing Word* : Roy Eugene Davis. CSA Press, Georgia; \$3.00; Pp. 149; 1968

The book under review is a 'Liberal Restatement' of the Bhagavadgita with an Introductory Essay and Definitive Commentary by Roy Eugene Davis. If one is filled with questions and searching for answers to one's needs, then this enlightening book is reading that will aid in one's quest. The world of the spirit is unfolded and open to comprehension through meditation. When there are so many commentaries on Bhagavadgita why another commentary? and is its message relevant to the needs of men and women in to-day's world?

The answer to the first question is simple: the Bhagavadgita is a universal scripture with an ever up-to-date message. And since it covers every facet of man's experience, explains the true nature of Reality, the true nature of soul, the reason for man's involvement with the world and the way to absolute freedom, it is indeed relevant. The problems confronting man, regardless of his time and social or cultural setting, are always the same—how to understand what is taking place about him, handle his inner urges, relate in a meaningful way to others and, eventually,

realise personal spiritual fulfilment. Central to the theme of the Gita is the concept that every man is divine, whether he is conscious of this fact or not.

Every scripture has two aspects, the temporary and perishable, which belongs to the people of the time and place where it was produced. The eternal and imperishable aspect is applicable to all people in all countries in all time periods. It must be remembered that all commentaries concerning scriptures are coloured by the author himself as well as his reflections based on current needs.

The message of Gita is both metaphysical and ethical, the science of reality and the way to the realisation of reality. It is therefore, a complete manual of instruction from which any one, regardless of his station in life or his personal aspirations, can derive inspiration and guidance.

Although he may not persuade the rationalist and empiricist of the existence of God, Roy Eugene Davis has given a lucid and meaningful interpretation of God in the Bhagavadgita and the mystic's encounter with the Other.



*Shree Swaminarayan's Vachanamritam* : H. T. Dave. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay; 1978; Pp. 680; Rs. 60.00

Those who are unfamiliar with Sree Swaminarayan's philosophical and religious thought will find this volume by H.T. Dave an admirable introduction to the renowned Saint. It presents and analyses the essentials of his spiritual life with remarkable insight and lucidity using familiar terms, sound logic and numerous scriptural confirmations.

Vachanamruta is the scriptural text containing the discourses and discussions by Shree Swaminarayana delivered in the assemblies of (Satsang) saints and *bhaktas*. There are 262 such discourses held at separate places at Gadhada, Sarangpur, Kariyani, Loya, Panchala, Vartal, Ahmedabad which he frequently visited. From among the thousands of such discourses these selected 262 are chronologically arranged and ably compiled and translated into simple English language with incomparable depth and splendour. In the Foreword to the book Swami Ranganathananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad, says 'the basic spiritual nourishment of man forms the theme of the teachings of the Vachanamrutam. This nourishment comes through love of God and love of service of man—of God in man'. According to Dave, "Vachanamrutam is the quintessence of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Vedanta

Sutras, the Bhagavadgita and other scriptures, spoken by the Lord Himself. It, therefore, contains the words of wisdom eternal in nature and redemptive in character. The words though transcendental are comprehensive to the empirical mind. It is in the form of dialogues between the saints and the Lord, on various subjects concerning the spiritual development of the *Jivas*. It lays great stress on spiritual experience based on philosophical understanding. It is to be studied in synthetical sequence to receive enlightenment on the subject of the evolution of the *Jiva* from his empiric state to the brahmic state, "the state of the total redemption". Thus Vachanamruta is a revealed text in as much as the words have come straight from the mouth of Shree Swaminarayana, who was Himself an *avatar*, the Ultimate Reality. The uniqueness and the supremacy of His avatarhood lies in the fact that he lived and practised the best and the highest elements of Bhagavatadharma viz. the highest morality (Dharma), the philosophical wisdom (Jnana), detachment (Vairagya), and deep devotion (Bhakti). These four elements are better called the four ingredients of spiritual life, and are the very warp and woof of Bhagavat Dharma, better known as "Akantik Dharma".

Born in 1781 A.D., Lord Shree Swaminarayan advocated this *Dharma* with all earnestness, zeal and enthusiasm and his mantra "Swaminarayana" which flourished on the tip of every man's tongue, explained how Lord, the creator, sustainer and inner controller of this universe is *one and without a second*.

Shree Swaminarayan's philosophy is the highest and purest type of Theism—philosophically

known as Panentheism—the belief that God is present everywhere. He transcends this universe.

A copious volume which deals with the 'five realities' viz. *Jiva*, *Ishwar*, *Maya*, *Brahman* and *Parabrahman* as eternal and distinct from one another, cannot be dealt with adequately here. The book deserves serious consideration from students of religion and philosophy.

K.S. RAMAKRISHNA RAO

# Brief Notices

D. Raghavan

*The Cultural Heritage of India (Vol. V): Languages and Literatures:* Eds. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee and K.M. Munshi. Ramakrishna Mission, Calcutta

This is the final volume of a comprehensive series devoted to languages and literatures of India. Running into some 800 pages, the panoramic coverage ranges from the ancient literature of Brahminism to the latest Adivasi languages and literatures of India. Many eminent scholars and intellectuals have contributed to make this a monumental work projecting an integrated picture of the literary and linguistic traditions of India.

*The Other India:* Ed. I. J. Bahadur Singh. Arnold Heinemann, New Delhi; Rs. 50.00

There are nearly 10 million Indians living abroad, enjoying various degrees of citizenship rights in different countries. This book is based on papers contributed on the many aspects of the subject during a recent seminar, and includes a frank discussion of the numerous problems faced by Indians abroad. The basic theme running through its pages is one of building bridges of understanding and cooperative endeavour.

*Indian Writing in English:* Ed. Krishna Nandan Sinha. Heritage Publishers, New Delhi; Rs. 60.00

The book offers certain New perspectives on creative writing in English by Indian authors. Works of contemporary writers such

as R.K. Narayan, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala and Kamala Das are critically assessed and transcripts of live interviews with some are reproduced in full.

*The Child in India:* Eds. Sharad D. Gokhale and Neera K. Sohoni. Somaiya Publications, Bombay; Rs 75.00

India's child population constitutes about 17.5 per cent of the total population of the world, and nearly 30 per cent of the population of Asia. In India the child accounts for as high as 42 per cent of the Indian people. The problems of the Indian child are analysed and discussed from all angles—demographic, biological and emotional.

*The Wildlife of Ladakh:* J. N. Ganhar. Haramukh Publications, Srinagar; Rs 40.00

Though sparsely populated owing to adverse climatic conditions in the Himalayan heights, Ladakh teems with a fascinating and rare variety of species of wildlife—the yak, the ammon, the bharal, the ibex, the markhor and the snow leopard. Beautifully illustrated with sketches and photographs, the book is a useful addition to literature on the little-known land of the Ladakhis which incidentally, figures as the biggest district in India.

*People of the Prayer Wheel:* Parmanand Sharma. Ambika Publications; Rs 65.00

Perhaps no other country or people have been so thoroughly metamorphosed by Buddhism in the history of mankind as Tibet and the Tibetans. It was in 1244 A.D. that the Mongol Chief Godan invited the Sakyapandit Kunga Gyaltsen to teach the laws of the Buddha to the 'barbarian' Mongols. The book offers a popular history of this fascinating country up to the modern times.

*The Way of Tao:* Bhagwan Rajneesh. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi; Pp. 574; Rs 100.00

Lao-tse, the Chinese sage, lived some 2,500 years ago and compressed his inspired message into 81 maxims or *sutras*, known for their simplicity and evocative value. Seemingly self-contradictory, the Tao philosophy would perhaps offer original solutions to many modern problems. This lucid exposition throws interesting light on

quite a few things which are commonly found in the Indian systems of thought.

*Fundamental Issues for the Seventh Lok Sabha:* R. S. Arora. Institute for the Study of International Relations, New Delhi; Pp. 174; Rs 65.00

This monograph gives an overview of India's problems as they have developed during the last three decades of independence. Inadequacies in the political system are discussed and some solutions suggested; concepts and policies relating to public sector growth, independence of the judiciary and the relevance of non-alignment have been carefully examined.

*Oil: Rich Man, Poor Man:* S.S. Khera. National Publishing House, New Delhi; 1979; Pp. 540; Rs 60.00

The author makes a reasoned plea for India switching over to coal in a big way to meet her energy requirements, in view of the world oil crisis and the rocketing oil prices. Next only to coal are the other alternatives such as nuclear power, solar energy, hydroelectric power and bio-gas. Since the gestation period for the commercial exploitation of such resources is quite long and uncertain, the author advocates acceleration of the search for indigenous fuel sources.

*Global History of Philosophy (Vol. I): The Axial Age:* Ed. R. C. Richmond. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi; Pp. 240; Rs 45.00

As opposed to the traditional bifurcation of philosophical systems into Western and non-Western schools, the authors take a global view in the treatment of the subject. Divided into two parts, the first deals with the mythical and classical Age when thinkers and seers like Confucius, Lao-tse, Socrates, Buddha, Mahavira and Zoroaster reigned supreme. The second part provides a comparative study of the metaphysical teachings of the Greek thinkers and those of the Hindu savants who had established the six *Darshanas* or systems of philosophy.

*A Study of Yoga:* Janeswar Ghosh. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi; Pp. 274; Rs 45.00

This is an excellent introduction to those interested in the theoretical and intellectual aspects of Yoga as distinct from the clinical features of the Yoga Shastra. The first chapter deals at

length with the criticism and doubts expressed by Western Indologists. The rest of the book is devoted to a discussion of the basic tenets of the Yogic system such as the Mind, Nature, Samkhya psychology and philosophy.

*Five Windows to God:* K.P. Bahadur. Somaiya Publications, Bombay; Pp. 107; Rs 22.00

As a layman's handbook on religion, this slender volume tries to answer two basic questions: "Is there a God?" and "Why should we seek Him and how?" The five windows are opened up to the reader in five chapters entitled: (i) The Transcendental Approach—the Testimony of the *Katha Upanishad*; (ii) The Scientific Approach—the Testimony of Gaudapada; (iii) The Theistic Approach—the Testimony of Faith; (iv) The Testimony of Saints Shri Ramakrishna and Shri Ramana Maharshi; and (v) The Testimony of Miracles. These five windows present a total picture of the Hindu view of Godhood and the many paths to reach the Ultimate.

